

*The Impact of the Better Living Texans/Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program on Selected Food and Nutrition Behaviors Among Food Stamp and Food Stamp Eligible Audiences*

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A statewide telephone survey of individuals who had participated in the Better Living for Texans/Food Stamp Nutrition Education (BLT/FSNE) program was conducted between August and October 2003 to assess the impact of the program on selected food and nutrition behaviors. **METHODS:** County agents provided the authors with 1,139 participants who had completed a series of lessons offered through the program. These names served as the initial sampling frame for the evaluation. Survey participants (n=381) were asked questions regarding the extent to which they practiced selected dietary behaviors, safe food handling practices and food resource management skills both before and after attending the program. Questions about participation in other federal programs, as well as social and demographic characteristics were also included in the survey. **RESULTS:** A majority of survey participants were female (97%) and Hispanic (76%); more than half (59%) of the surveys were conducted in Spanish. Twenty-nine percent of the participants reported not having their high school diploma or GED, while another 33.6% reported having a high school degree or GED. One in five participants indicated having annual household incomes of less than \$5,000, with another 34.7% between \$5,000 and \$15,000. Household size averaged  $4.23 \pm 1.62$  (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation), with more than 80% of the survey participants reporting at least one child under the age of 18 living in their households. Results of paired comparison t-tests indicated that survey participants made significant increases in their daily consumption of three food categories: vegetables (1.77 servings before and 2.70 after BLT), fruit (1.99 servings before and 2.71 after BLT) and milk, cheese and other dairy products (2.25 servings before and 2.62 after BLT), after attending the BLT program, compared to before the program. Paired comparison t-tests also revealed meaningful increases on the part of participants after the BLT program, as compared to before BLT, for each of the following behaviors: properly washing hands before preparing food; properly washing the cutting board, knife and counter top after working with raw meat or poultry; and, refrigerating cooked foods in the proper amount of time. In addition, paired comparison t-tests revealed increases in the self-ratings of the ability of respondents to feed their households nutritious meals after attending the BLT program. The BLT program was rated either excellent (72.9%) or good (25.0%) by nearly all survey respondents. Over four-fifths (85.8%) of respondents indicated the BLT program was the only Extension program they had ever attended. To summarize, these results indicated that BLT program participants were able to make healthier food choices, safe food handling and food resource management practices as a result of participating in the Extension-conducted Better Living for Texans program.